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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to improve the attendance rate for African American male students in the After School Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) program. The attendance rate for male students was far below that of female students. The following strategies to increase male participation in the reading program were developed: local businesses and foundations were sought to fund the program; parent groups were organized to assist with book distributions, field trips, and assembly programs; and African American males were recruited to serve as tutors. Analysis of the data revealed that the attendance rate for African American male students improved. This improvement appears related to both the strong parental involvement in this program and the presence of male role models as tutors. Student interaction with adult males is discussed as a particularly important factor behind the success of this program. Contains 11 references. (Author/TS)

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PRACTICUM REPORT

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for the Advancement of Education

Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

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Improving the Attendance Rate for African American Male Students in an After School Reading Program Through Parental Involvement, Positive Male Role Models, and Tutorial Instruction.

by

Mary Dennard Tanksley

Cluster 58

A Practicum II Report Presented to the
Ed. D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

1995

PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Mary D. Tanksley under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

24 July 1995

Date of Final Approval of Report

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Roberta Wong Bouverat, Ph.D., Adviser

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ABSTRACT

Improving the Attendance Rate for African American Male Elementary Students in an After School Reading Program Through Parental Involvement, Positive Male Role Models, and Tutorial Instruction. Tanksley, Mary Dennard, 1995: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Reading Program/After School Program/Tutorial Program/ Community Support/Parent Participation/Male Role Models.

This practicum was designed to improve attendance rate for African American male students in the After School Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) program. The attendance rate for male students was far below that of female students.

The writer developed strategies to increase male participation in the reading program. Local businesses and foundations were sought to fund the program. Parent groups were organized to assist with book distributions, field trips, and assembly programs. African American males were recruited to serve as tutors. Involving community, parents, and male role models as tutors were techniques used to encourage male participation.

Analysis of the data revealed that the attendance rate for African American male students improved. Parents were involved in field trips, book distributions, and assembly programs. Male role models served as tutors for the instructional phase of the program, thus, enabling student interaction with adult males. African American male students benefited from the tutorial instruction.

* * * * * * *

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Community

The practicum took place in an urban area of the southeastern United States. The city is an industrious community which has the influence of a large military base. The area lends itself to employment for the surrounding counties. With a population of 175,000 people, the growing community is a leading city in the state.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The work setting for the writer is that of a local church building. The members consented to lease classroom space for the After School Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) program. Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) is a national organization with specific goals and guidelines. The program is designed to reach the economically underprivileged children. Activities are designed to get children interested in reading, to get parents and families involved in workshops and other programs for the educational benefit of the children, and to provide books for the children to read at no cost to the children.

The funding of the program is provided by different organizations in the community. The donations include grants

from federal agencies, community services groups, local foundations, and religious organizations. Books are sold to the After School RIF program at reduced rates:

The children attending the After School RIF program are provided reading enrichment activities for one hour per week. Transportation is provided for the students by the city housing authority and a snack is furnished for the students each week. A monthly book distribution allows students an opportunity to select a book that the students keep.

A total of 41 African American students attend the program at some point during the school year. The average attendance rate per meeting is 15 students. In addition to the students, three teachers and one assistant participate in the program. The role of the writer is to coordinate the program and to work with the students in reading enrichment activities. As the program coordinator, the writer plans field trips, makes lesson plans, writes proposals, and corresponds with agencies that contribute other services. The writer serves on the book ordering committee, keeps financial records, and maintains attendance reports.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

African American male elementary students did not show an interest in the After School Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) program.

Problem Documentation

The evidence that supported African American male students' disinterest in the After School RIF program was seen in the weekly attendance rate. Of the 15 students who attended each week, only three were male students.

Enrichment field trips to encourage student interest did not promote male participation. Four field trip activity records showed that fewer male students were in attendance. The number of male students in attendance for the field trips was three while the number of female students in attendance was 12.

The students' parents indicated a need for tutorial instruction for their children. The After School RIF program did not provide tutorial service, but reading enhancement activities only. Parents wanted assistance with homework for the children and requested tutorial instruction. The children met one hour per

week and limited time did not permit tutorial services. The one hour sessions were sufficient for reading enrichment activities only.

Causative Analysis

There were several possible causes of disinterest among African American male students in the After School RIF program. One cause was that the African American elementary male students were less likely to be attracted to an activity that had reading as the core. The title of the program "Reading Is Fundamental" was of little importance to African American male students who were seeking after school entertainment. Therefore, the attendance rate for African American male students was lower than that for female students.

Most African American male students who lived in public housing did not have fathers living in the homes with them. African American male elementary students, for whom the program was also designed, did not have positive adult male images in the homes to influence or encourage the male students to attend the program. Many African American male students were exposed to negative role models such as dope pushers and drug dealers in the neighborhood. The elementary African American male students who lived in public housing had few, if any, positive male figures to teach the value of a reading program.

When recruiting children for the program, volunteers approached the heads of households who are females. The

mothers generally responded positively for the daughters' participation but were apprehensive about the sons' participation. The appropriate method to recruit African American male students was not addressed by the After School RIF staff. The recruitment method used to encourage African American female students did not attract African American male students to the program.

Mothers or other females were the heads of households for most of the male students who lived in the public housing area. Females could not serve as male role models for boys, thus, females were less likely to influence the male children in the family. The absence of positive male role models in the community might have an effect on the selection of a reading program as a choice of activity for male students.

African American male students were not willing to give up free time after school to devote to reading which was a school related activity. Many African American male students often resented school and, therefore, resented any project that related to school. The school dropout rate for the African American male student population was higher than that of most other groups in the United States. The dropout rate might be indicative of the attitude that African American male students have about school and other academic related activities.

Several activities to encourage participation in the After School RIF program were not of interest to the male population.

Cultural enrichment activities such as plays, ballets, and museum exhibits, might not characterize a macho image for the young African American male student. Events such as plays, ballets, and museum exhibits, frequently did not reflect the environment of the African American male student.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Literature on African American males and the relationship to reading interest could be seen in areas of parental involvement, reading success, and the absence of positive male role models.

According to Berger (1991) the developmental needs of children before and after school were not being met. When children did not take advantage of enrichment experiences after school, many were left alone for long periods of time. Parents were not involved in communicating with school and other agencies to fulfill before and after school needs of children.

Washington and Newman (1991) examined the effects of absences of African American male role models for African American male students. Washington and Newman reported that African American female students fared better in education than did African American males. Thus, a higher level of education existed among the African American females than African American males. In the formal educational setting of males, there were few, if any, African American male teachers. According to Washington and Newman 85% of elementary teachers were women; only 0.2% were African American men. African American

male teachers in the secondary level represented only 3.2% of the teacher population. Thus, African American male students might have viewed academic achievement as a "girl thing."

Reports indicated that children need adults as role models, as mentors, as rule makers, teachers, and supporters (Anson et al., 1991). Children who did not build a trusting relationship with adults when very young had difficulty engaging themselves in school. The lack of the development of positive emotional relationships denied the children the opportunity to build gateways to success.

Morris, Shaw, and Perney (1990) reported that classroom teachers needed additional help if the teachers were to meet the needs of all children in a classroom. One area specified as a need for additional help was in the teaching of reading. Morris, Shaw, and Perney reported that some children did not have the opportunity to learn to read which was a key factor in the success of academic achievement. The opportunity to learn to read was not available to all groups of children. Especially true was that of the economically underprivileged child. Children from middle to upper socioeconomic levels were more likely to be tutored at home by the parents than children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. Classroom teachers did not have time to give individual children direct supervision for reading.

Much of the literature showed that children who received help from parents were more successful in reading. Many parents

of low socioeconomic levels, however, were not as likely to serve as tutors or teachers of children (Olmsted, 1991). Many parents felt that the teaching of reading was the responsibility of the classroom teacher. Parents did not feel that they were important in the learning process of children.

Restructuring of schools became a major focus in education by principals, teachers, parents, and other community leaders. Cultural inclusion was a key element in restructuring efforts. Cultural inclusion, as reported by Hollins and Spencer (1990) needed to go beyond replicating programs that were successful for white students and applying the culture activity to African American students. Hollins and Spencer indicated that if African American students were to experience academic success at the same levels as other students, then cultural inclusion must reflect the background of the African American students.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The writer established the following goals and expectations for this practicum:

African American male elementary students will show an interest in the After School RIF program. The participation for African American male students will increase and be comparable to that of female students. African American male students' parents will get involved in the learning process of their children. And finally, African American male students will meet for two hours each week to participate in tutorials.

Expected Outcomes

The writer proposed the following outcomes:

(1) Male students will improve attendance records from three male students per session to seven male students per session. Records from previous year will be used to make a comparison with the records of the current school year.

(2) Male students will improve the attendance rate for special cultural enrichment activities from an average of three male students per activity to ten male students per activity. The activity attendance record will be used to chart and compare the

attendance rate.

(3) Male students will receive one and one-half hours of tutorial instruction per week when compared to none offered last year. The number of hours instructed will be recorded each week. The total number of hours will be computed and reported in a summary.

Measurement of Outcomes

For Outcome 1, attendance records were kept for 32 weeks for African American male students in the program. At the end of the 32 week period, the average attendance for African American male students was tabulated. A comparison of the previous year's records was used to note progress. For Outcome 1, the male student attendance improved considerably. The average attendance rate for African American male students increased from three students per meeting to 13 students per meeting.

For Outcome 2, attendance records were kept for special enrichment activities. The number of African American male students who attended the previous year was compared to the number of African American male students who attended during the 32 week practicum period. The average number of African American male students increased from three students to 14 students for the enrichment activities.

For Outcome 3, the number of hours devoted to tutorial instruction each week was recorded. For 32 weeks, students received an additional hour in the program for tutorial instruction.

Students spent two hours each meeting compared to one hour each meeting the previous year. The additional hour allowed time for one and one-half hours of tutorial instruction. The students received 420 hours of tutorial instruction compared to none the previous year.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

African American male elementary students did not show an interest in the After School RIF program. Some possible solutions to the problem were studied. Researchers reported on the importance of parent involvement, the impact of positive male role models, and the need for tutorial instruction. A closer look at the studies revealed ways of improving the attendance rate for African American elementary male students in the After School RIF program.

There were several ways in which parents might become involved in the educational process of children. Teachers, however, played a vital role in promoting programs that enhanced parental involvement (Smith, 1990). According to Greenwood and Hickman (1991) there were different approaches to getting parents involved. The teacher's role in implementing a program might be characterized as an interaction between school and home. Parental involvement contributed to positive outcomes for the student, such as a higher academic achievement, a positive self-esteem, an improved attendance, better student behavior, and positive parent perceptions of school climate.

Berger (1991) reported that schools, parents, and community must come together to work for the achievement and success of all children. A communication system between community and school was an important avenue to involve students in enrichment programs, recreation, and positive social outlets.

Morris, Shaw, and Perney (1991) reported on the success of the Howard Street Tutoring Program. The program was designed to provide after-school reading instruction to public school children. The children were selected based on the reading levels which lagged behind that of the children's peers. The Howard Street Tutoring Program identified students who needed help and recruited tutors. The program was successful in offering an out-of-school tutoring program to children giving them an alternative instruction that took low readers where they were functioning and moved the children forward at a quick and interesting pace. A small group of adult volunteers made it possible for a community-based program to provide lower grade children an opportunity to learn to read.

Journal writing to improve reading was reported by Gains (1987). The use of reading diaries was examined in which parents of poor readers recorded the child's work. The home reading activities gave parents an opportunity to work directly with the children in the area of reading, thus giving the children individual reading time with an adult. Positive change for both the parent

and child was reported.

House and Wohlt (1991) reported on other benefits of tutoring. Tutoring had positive effects on the attitudes of children. Self-confidence and study habits improved when children were tutored. The effects of tutoring lasted long after the tutoring sessions ended. Tutoring children was found to offer a significant benefit to African American students.

Juel (1991) coordinated a tutoring program and reported the significance of positive role models. African American male role models seemed especially powerful in promoting success in the tutoring program. Many of the children in the program came from single-parent families headed by mothers. Several mothers commented on the positive effects of having a male tutor for children.

African American students with a nurtured, academic background, experienced academic success. When both the home and the school were involved in the education of the child, the greater the chances for success were later in life for the child (Olmsted, 1991). Children from low-income and minority families were stronger when there were strong ties between home, school, and the educational arena. Children adjusted better and ultimately performed better in school when parents became involved.

Berger (1991) examined parent involvement in schools in the past as well as the present. Berger reported that parents had

always been involved in the educational process of children but that involvement had changed over time. Parent participation in schools included different levels according to Berger. The involvement ranged from an active partner to a passive supporter. Berger listed five possible ways to get parent participation:

> "parent as an active partner and educational leader at home and school; parent as a decision maker; parent as a school volunteer or paid employer; parent as a liaison between home and school to support homework; and parent as a supporter of the educational goals of the school." (p. 217)

Description and Selected Solutions

After the writer reviewed the literature, there were solutions relating to the problem that were striking. Some that the writer found to be helpful included activities to get parents involved in the educational process of the children. Another possible solution was the use of African American male role models in the program for the African American male students. And finally, tutorial sessions to improve student learning were included. Parent involvement, the use of African American male role models, and tutorial sessions were attainable solutions that the writer was prepared to use in order to improve male interest in the After School RIF program.

The After School RIF program provided books for the students to read. A monthly book distribution gave the students

an opportunity to choose a book to keep. Parents served on the book selection and book distribution committees.

The operation of the After School RIF program was supported by the local housing authority. The substance and drug abuse prevention officer was especially interested in the improvement of male attendance. The students in the program were residents of public housing, therefore, the substance and drug abuse prevention officer was available to assist the writer with the strategies to improve male interest.

Berger (1991) reported on strategies in which teachers could get parents involved in the education process of their children. The writer examined the benefits of using parents as chaperones. In the process of planning field trips for the students in the program, the writer contacted the parents. The parents were given the opportunity to serve as chaperones for any or all of the field trip activities. In Berger's examination of parent involvement in schools, he stated that involvement ranged from an active partner to a passive supporter. As passive supporters of the After School RIF program, parents served as an audience for assembly programs.

Parental involvement was a major component of the practicum, however, other areas were explored as well. Positive male role models proved to be helpful in working with male students. Juel (1991) reported on a tutoring program that used athletes with backgrounds similar to the backgrounds of the

students. The African American male role models had a tremendous effect on the attitudes of male students according to Juel.

Tutors, who were certified teachers, provided assistance for students with their homework. Tutorial instruction provided tremendous help for the economically disadvantaged readers. Morris, Shaw and Perney (1991) reported on the success of the Howard Street Tutoring Program which was designed for readers who performed below grade level. The writer coordinated a tutoring session for African American male students who participated in the After School RIF program.

Report of Action Taken

A thirty-two week program to improve the interest of African American male students in the After School RIF program included different strategies. Activities to get parents involved, recruitment to secure positive male role models, and time to provide tutorial instructions were implemented.

Parents were involved in the After School RIF program in many different aspects. A parent meeting was held at the beginning of the practicum period. The meeting convened at the housing rental office so that parents could meet in an environment that was familiar and convenient for them. During the meeting, the writer informed the parents of the goals of the After School RIF program and the role that the parents would

play.

As a national goal of the Reading Is Fundamental program, children were given the opportunity to select a book to keep as their own. The monthly book distribution was an activity that the parents could get involved. Parents signed a list to indicate the months that they were available to come to the RIF site to assist with the book distribution. Transportation to the site was provided by the housing authority. Each month the writer would call the parents and remind them of the book distribution. The reminder served as an opportunity to keep the lines of communication open with the After School RIF staff and the parents.

The writer used a cultural event as another tool to keep parents involved in the program. Annually, students received tickets from the school district to attend the Indian Cultural Festival at a local college. Many of the disadvantaged youths, however, did not participate due to the lack of transportation and supervision. To eliminate these problems, first, the writer contacted the housing authority and made arrangements for the youths to get transportation to the college. Then the writer located the festival sponsors and requested complimentary tickets for the children's parents. The housing authority provided the transportation, and the parents provided the supervision. None of the tutors was available to attend the festival with the students; therefore, it was the sole responsibility of the parents to arrange

the meeting place for pick-up, to decide on the time for departure, to agree on the length of time at the festival, and to provide supervision for the children. Parents were involved in the capacity of coordinators and chaperones. At the end of the event, they made written reports to present to the writer.

Another area was examined to get parents involved. The writer contacted a professional basketball team and made arrangements for the students to attend a game. Because the African American male students in the After School RIF program were particularly interested in sports, the basketball game served as a motivational strategy for the male students. Once again, to insure parent involvement, an organizational meeting was scheduled. The writer sent notices home to the parents with instructions to be followed if they wanted the children to attend the game. First, the parents were to come to the meeting to "sign-up" the children. Next, the parents were to come to discuss ways in which the program could be improved. And, finally, the writer wanted to discuss ways that the parents could help in developing reading interest in their children.

Though the basketball game was an adventure for the children and parents, it also served as an excellent avenue to communicate with parents. The writer met with the housing authority officer to get approval to meet with the parents at the rental office. The rental office in the housing complex was walking distance for the parents.

The meeting gave the parents an opportunity to give input on the selection of books that were to be purchased. The parents asked questions about the program. They had concerns about behavior at the pick-up site. At the meeting, the parents provided solutions to the problems. The meeting also gave the writer an opportunity to discuss with the parents some tips on ways they could help the children gain an interest in reading.

A field trip to the state capitol was organized by the writer. During spring break, the older RIF students traveled one hundred miles to visit the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center. The enrichment activity was a means by which parents could read to their children as they served as chaperones. The day's event concluded with a trip to the World of Coke Museum.

The writer planned a local field trip for the younger students' spring break activity. They went to the theater to see a children's play. The youth later learned that the play was based on a children's book. The students were challenged to get their parents to take them to the library. As parents served as chaperones, they were presented with a way to get children interested in reading.

Not only were parents active as chaperones, but they were active as an audience. In another effort to keep parents involve, the writer coordinated assembly programs. For the holiday program, each tutor worked with the students to formulate a reading activity such as a skit, song, poem, or a story reading.

Parents were invited to the program to watch the performance. The writer made prior arrangements with the housing authority for transportation. Parents and other siblings in attendance made the event a family affair. Serving in the capacity of an audience was an excellent way of getting parents involved.

A Black History Program was also coordinated by the writer. Tutors assigned research activities and provided information on distinguished African Americans. The students, with tutors assisting, prepared written presentations for the program. An African American attorney was invited as the guest speaker. The writer met with the housing authority officer and made transportation arrangements for the parents. The Black History Program provided another opportunity for parents to serve as an audience.

The assistance provided by the housing authority continued to be a key element for success. The African American male, coordinator for substance abuse prevention, assisted the writer in recruiting male students for the program. He served as a male role model for the male students. As the coordinator for substance abuse prevention, he attended many of the events and made arrangements for transportation.

Other males were also recruited to work with the program. One of the van drivers who transported the students to the tutorial site was an African American male. Of the three vans that were used to transport the students, the students favored the

male driver's van. During the two-hour stay at the program, the male driver served as an assistant for the children.

In addition to female teachers, African American males were selected to work as tutors for the children. Each week, the children were given two hours of tutorial assistance. Students brought homework that had been assigned by their classroom teacher. Academic work was provided for students who came without homework.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

African American male students did not show an interest in the After School Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) program. The enrollment and the attendance rate for male students were lower than that of the female students. Parental involvement, positive male role models, and tutorial services were strategies used to resolve the problem.

Outcome 1 of the practicum was to improve the attendance records of the African American male students in the After School RIF program. The male students were to improve from three male students per session to seven male students per session. Records of the male students' attendance from the previous year were compared to the attendance records during the 32-week practicum experience. The comparison showed that the male attendance improved significantly. The African American male students' interest in the After School RIF program improved based on the attendance rate. The attendance rate for the male students increased from an average of three males per session to an average of 13 males per session.

For Outcome 2, male students were to improve the attendance rate for special enrichment activities from an average of three male students per activity to ten male students per activity. During the practicum period, the male student attendance for enrichment activities increased from an average of three male students per activity to 14 male students per activity. The improved attendance rate reflected the interest in the After School RIF program for the African American male students.

For Outcome 3, male students were to receive one and one-half hours of tutorial instruction per week. The previous year, time for tutorial instruction was not included in the RIF program. The male students received tutorial instruction for 28 weeks. (The students did not received tutorial instruction during special enrichment events.) The African American male students were tutored for 420 hours compared to none for the previous year. Getting help with homework improve the interest of African American male students in the After School RIF program.

Discussion

African American male elementary students did not show an interest in the After School RIF program. The attendance rate for the male students was much lower than that of the female students. The goal of the After School RIF program was to improve the reading skills of socioeconomically deprived youth. Researchers reported on the importance of parent involvement in

education, discussed the impact of positive male role models on African American male students, and indicated a need for tutorial instruction for disadvantage youth. The writer proposed to seek parental involvement, to provide male role models, and to offer tutorial services for the students in the program. By including these aspects of the program, more male students would participate in the program, thus enabling African American male students to improve reading and other academic skills.

The practicum was a success in that the African American male attendance increased from an average of three students per meeting to an average of 13 students per meeting. For enrichment activities, the average male attendance increased from three students to 14 students per activity. The students also benefited from 420 hours of tutorial instruction. The interest of African American male students in the After School RIF program improved.

Recommendations

When making plans to increase male student attendance, it became necessary to make arrangements for a larger female population also. The program was designed to accommodate 30 students; sixty-eight students were present at one meeting. Because the RIF staff did not want to turn away any male students, an open enrollment policy was in effect. Transportation, the use of three vans, was the limiting factor for participation.

The drivers of the three vans did not receive orientation for the RIF program. They were selected by the housing authority as drivers. This was one personnel aspect of the program that the writer did not plan. However, the writer has learned how very important the drivers are to the success of the program. They were later used as assistants.

Using the van drivers as assistants had advantages; one of the drivers was a male who related very well to the male students. However, about half way through the program, the housing authority promoted the male driver to a full time position. He was no longer able to transport the students. Even though the new position was a great opportunity for the male driver, it affected the operation of the After School RIF program. Not only did the male attendance go down the following week, but so did the female attendance rate. The driver was replaced by a female driver, thus, eliminating a male role model.

In securing males to work for the program, it may be necessary to recruit more than needed especially when using teachers. The driver was not the only male personnel to leave the program. Another male left to attend classes for advance-teacher certification. It may be necessary to get male tutors to commit their services for the duration of the program (school year or summer).

To increase the male population meant increasing the female population also. Female students could not be discriminated

against and turned away because there were no vacancies for female students. The budget, therefore, had to be rewritten to accommodate more students. Financial supporters such as church organizations, federal agencies, local foundations, and local businesses were sought to sponsor the program. Finding funding was an ongoing process.

Dissemination

The practicum report is to be shared with ministers who have shown an interest in starting a tutorial program in their churches. Other community members from the surrounding area visit the site and are interested in starting a similar program, therefore, this report is to be shared with them. The director of the housing authority, who plays a tremendous part in implementing the program, is to be informed of the results. The coordinator for substance and drug abuse prevention is especially interested in the male attendance. Many organizations and foundations are funding the program. Each is to be notified of the results of the practicum.

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